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A MIRACLE-PLAY IN THE WEST INDIES.

IN St. Kitts the negro population make a prolonged holiday of the week beginning with Christmas eve and ending on New Year's night. Every day from morning until sunset they parade the streets with music, masque, and grotesque costumes. Among the performers were men dressed as women, who stalked about on high stilts, and at times turned in a waltz, with great ease and agility, and untiring energy. There were performers dressed as Indians with feathered and horn headdresses, tomahawk, and leggings, who pranced about in wild caperings in imitation of a war-dance. Others were dressed as British sailors, who twined ribbons about a portable May-pole, and there was a group of minstrels, consisting of one man and two women, who sang the old-time Christy songs to the music of a guitar and tamborines. And all these were perpetually in movement, hopping, dancing, and gyrating to the monotonous beat of the tamborine and the tinkle of the triangle. From morning until night they apparently never ceased, and were as untiring at the close of the day as at the beginning. They were followed by a streaming crowd wherever they went, and whenever they paused a circle gathered around them, apparently less to watch the performance than to dance to the music. The whole negro population seemed to be bitten by the tarantula. The little pickaninnies hopped about in the gutter in perfect imitation of the motion of their elders, and the negro women of all ages bobbed and swung with indefatigable activity and enjoyment. A woman passing along with a burden on her head would pause to have a dance, and caper vigorously without disturbing the equilibrium of her load. One old woman with simian features and skinny limbs seemed possessed with an almost St. Vitus frenzy. Her beady eyes sparkled and she danced until she finally stiffened into a sort of cataleptic rigor. The performances are called "moka jumbic" dances, and probably had their remote origin in the forests of Africa, but the masques, songs, and miracle-plays have all been created under the influence of English education and a more or less African travesty of the Christian religion.

One of the most elaborate performances was a representation of the combat between David and Goliath. The two armies of Israel and Philistia were represented by about a dozen warriors each, armed with as great a variety of weapons and clad in as remarkable costume as the force which besieged the castle of Thundertentrock. There were some with tin gorgets in imitation of ancient armor, and with wooden tridents and spears for weapons, and others with cocked hats of portentous size and wooden guns, and still others with tur-

bans and scimitars like Turks of the burlesque stage. The armies defied each other with the sounding of conch shells and the banging of drums. Goliath, a stout negro clad in red and with a false beard of oakum, carried a heavy mace on his shoulder and brandished a huge wooden sword. He advanced, preceded by his armor-bearer, who was provided with a tin plate for a shield, and delivered his defiance in sounding blank verse. He was succeeded by David, a slight youth, who knelt in the arena and prayed, and then delivered his defiance in turn. The following is the dialogue between the combatants, which was evidently composed by some one of more elaborate literary faculty than the negroes, but was delivered with such emphasis on the long words and such a rolling of the rhythm as to make it sound like a burlesque : —

GOLIATH.

Where is the mighty man of war,
 Who dares accept the challenge of Philistia's chief,
 What victor king, what general drenched in blood,
 Claims this high privilege? What are his rights?
 What proud credentials does the boaster bring to prove his claim,
 What city laid in ashes? What ruined province,
 What slaughtered realms,
 What heads of heroes or what hearts of kings,
 In battle killed or at his altars slain,
 Has he to boast of his bright armory
 Thick set with spears, and swords, and coats of mail,
 Of vanquished nations by his single arm subdued?
 Where is the mortal man so bold
 So much a wretch, so out of love with life
 To dare the weight of this uplifted spear
 That never fell innoxious?
 Yet I swear I grudge the glory to his parting soul
 To fall by this right hand; 't will sweeten death
 To know he had the honor to contend
 With the dread son of Anak.
 Latest time from dread oblivion shall redeem his name
 Who dared to perish in unequal fight
 With Gath's triumphant champion.
 Come, advance, Philistia's god to Israel,
 Sound, my herald, sound for the battle.

DAVID.

Behold thy foe.

GOLIATH.

I see him not.

DAVID.

Behold him here.

GOLIATH.

Quit my sight. I do not war with boys.

DAVID.

I stand prepared. My single arm to thine.

GOLIATH.

Why this is mocking, minion. It may chance to cost
Thee dear. Sport not with things above thee—
But tell me who of all this numerous host
Expects his death from me. Which is the man
Whom Israel sends to meet my bold defiance?

DAVID.

The election of my sovereign falls on me.

GOLIATH.

On thee! on thee! by Dagon 't is too much.
Thou misled minion, thou a nation's champion!
'T would move my wrath at any other time.
But trifling 's out of time. Begone, light boy,
And tempt me not too far.

DAVID.

I do defy thee, thou foul idolater.
Hast thou not scorned the armies of the living God I serve?
By me he will avenge upon thy head
Thy nation's sins and thine.
Armed with his name, unshrinking
I dare meet the stoutest foe
That e'er bathed his hostile spear in blood.

GOLIATH.

The curses of Philistia's god be on thee;
This fine-drawn speech is meant
To lengthen out that little life
Thy words pretend to scorn.

DAVID.

Come on then. Mark us well.
Thou comest to me with sword and spear and shield.
In the dread name of Israel's God I come,
The living God of hosts, whom thou defiest.
Yet though no shield I bring,
No arms except these five smooth stones
I gathered from the brook,
With such a simple sling as shepherds use,
Yet all exposed, defenceless as I am.
The God I serve shall give thee up
A prey to my victorious arm. This day I mean.

GOLIATH.

Follow me. In this good spear I trust.

DAVID.

I trust in heaven. The God of battles
Stimulate my arm, and fire my soul
With ardors not its own.

The combat then engaged with prodigious flourishings and caperings on the part of Goliath, but David's deadly sling in the shape of a rubber return ball smote him in the forehead, and he fell and died in great muscular agony. The army of Israel charged upon that of Philistia and put it to flight, to gather in some other street and renew the performance. It was interesting to observe the fascinated eagerness with which the negro population watched the performance, and to hear the expression of delight when David was victorious and the Philistines put to flight. The scene had apparently all the reality to them of a miracle-play to the people of the Middle Ages, and no sense of incongruity or grotesqueness troubled their naïve mind. An attempt has been made to prohibit the play on the ground that it is a travesty on religion, and it will probably be eventually suppressed. The performers came from a village on the windward side of the island, and had evidently rehearsed their play with great care.

Alfred M. Williams.

Editor's Note.—The proof of this paper was never seen by Mr. Williams, who passed away in the island whose quaint custom he had recorded. See the memorial notice given on another page.